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MEDIA CONTACT:

Paula Freund

Press Secretary

Office of Mayor Greg Ballard – City of Indianapolis

paula.freund@indy.gov; C: (317) 464-7112

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MAYOR BALLARD DELIVERS 2011 STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

The following is the text of Mayor Gregory A. Ballard's 2011 State of the City Address, as prepared for delivery ([Click here](#) to view the video of the speech):

Council President Vaughn, Members of the City-County Council, special guests and friends; thank you for the honor of appearing before you for the fourth time to report on the state of our great city. Thank you to Jean for her kind words of introduction. And, of course, thank you to my wife Winnie for being my partner these last 28 years and a great first lady for our city.

When I originally selected the Artsgarden for tonight's speech, I did so because the arts play such a vital role in enhancing our urban environment and this modern engineering marvel stands at the center of the progress being made all across our city - from the outer neighborhoods to the urban center. But, in light of recent events - it symbolizes even more.

Each of these individual panes of glass is fundamentally vulnerable... but when joined together, their collective strength protects us from the harsh elements outside – and I don't have to tell you, we've experienced some harsh elements outside.

Our strength as a city was confronted by the senseless and tragic death of IMPD Officer David Moore. All of Indianapolis stood with Spencer and Jo Moore. As a community, we offered them our support and prayers. And their remarkable strength and love of our community, in turn, lifted our spirits.

Through this test, we emerged stronger for facing the challenge and prevailing together.

And so we gather here tonight – from diverse backgrounds with a common purpose: working together to make this city that we love even stronger, even in the face of the harshest elements.

It is customary during these annual reports for the Mayor to proclaim the state of the city as strong, which it is, but the word “strong” only describes our position today.

So, let us recognize our progress, understanding that together we strive to be more than just strong for today. We are moving forward and getting stronger – for tomorrow.

That strength is manifesting itself across the city. You cannot escape our progress. When we last met for this report, I set our goal high: making Indianapolis the most attractive place in the nation for the creation and retention of good jobs. And I am pleased to report to you today that very strong progress is being made, and – working together – we will not stop!

Last year, I stood before you and called for the largest investment in the history of our city to attract new jobs. We reclaimed 5 million dollars by holding accountable those companies that did not meet their tax abatement goals. Now we are using that money to aggressively pursue and retain jobs for the people of Indianapolis, and it is working!

2010 was the single greatest year of attracting new job commitments to our city in the last decade.

Indianapolis landed 8,700 new job commitments and over 900 million dollars in capital investment last year. That's 4,000 more job commitments than any other year since 2000. It's also more new job commitments than in 2003, 2004 and 2005 combined – and those were during good economic times!

Thanks to the work of Deputy Mayor Michael Huber, Scott Miller and our DevelopIndy team, Indianapolis is poised to lead the way to recovery. Our economic successes span the city and will provide good-paying jobs for people from all backgrounds, talents and interests.

Just yesterday, we announced 300 new jobs being created on the Eastside at Genesis Casket Company. Last month, I toured the new manufacturing center at Hat World, where 570 jobs are being created. Almost 600 high-tech jobs are being added at Dow AgroSciences. And, Arcadia plans to create 930 healthcare-related jobs!

Our aggressive pursuit of economic opportunities is moving Indianapolis forward, but we must remain vigilant. As companies and workers adapt to the ever-changing business climate, so must we as a city. Just because we did something well in the past does not mean we can rest on our laurels and assume that success will continue.

Take for instance, the imminent shuttering of the huge General Motors Stamping Plant. This former automotive powerhouse once provided thousands of jobs for our city. The decision of a few who chose no jobs over a new owner prompts the question, “what is next for this prime property just west of downtown?”

First and foremost, my administration is actively working to find another owner and we will continue to do so. Having said that, I also will not sit idly by – and watch this area become a blight on our city.

If new owners cannot be found in a reasonable amount of time, then let's think boldly and act decisively. The possibilities are endless. Perhaps this site could one day become a great live/work/play community that complements downtown, White River State Park and the Indianapolis Zoo. So, let's think ahead and be ready to act for the long-term good of the city that we love.

The former GM Stamping Plant can be among the greatest redevelopment opportunities in the history of our city.

So ... I have asked former Mayor Bill Hudnut and the highly respected Urban Land Institute to lead this important effort.

Thank you for joining us tonight and thank you for focusing your talents and expertise, once again, on the betterment of our great city.

Our relentless pursuit of new jobs and economic opportunity must continue as long as a single one of our residents cannot find work. There is probably not a person in this room who does not know someone who has been affected by this global recession.

Attracting new jobs and promoting new investments sets the stage for our recovery, but long-term success will only come when our workers have the necessary skills and training to fill those positions.

Our historic commitment to attracting new jobs is rivaled only by the unprecedented investments we are making in the education and training of our workers. Since 2008, EmployIndy has dedicated over 14 million dollars to help educate and train the unemployed and underemployed for new careers through our WorkOne Centers.

To further encourage job creation, retention, and economic growth, our priority must be a relentless quest to keep our fiscal house in order.

Successful businesses seek stability. Businesses are moving away from other cities where the question isn't whether taxes will go up – the question is by how much.

As many have noticed, Indianapolis is not being subtle. In fact all you have to do is talk to business leaders in Illinois; we are taking the argument straight to the decision makers. We have one of the best business climates in the nation, low taxes, great workers, AAA bond ratings, balanced budgets – and we are not going to be shy about saying so.

Three years ago, I entered office facing a projected deficit of 170-million dollars for 2012. That's right; a projected 170-million dollar deficit. Taxes had already been increased – and if borrowing and spending continued as planned, more tax increases were destined to follow.

But in my first year, I immediately ordered a five percent cut from non-public safety budgets. I ordered similar cuts in the next two budgets that followed. We slashed excess management, renegotiated contracts and looked for every opportunity to do more with less.

- We stopped the city from spending 40,000 dollars a year on desktop printers, while larger office printers sat unused.
- Simply paying the city's bills on time is saving taxpayers five million dollars in late fees and interest.
- And, just like many families, we now share our cell-phone minutes - saving taxpayers 135,000 dollars a year!

I could keep going and going, but you get the point. We are doing more with less and taxpayers are benefiting.

We cut income taxes by seven million dollars and you are paying on average one-third less now in property taxes than in 2007!

The bottom line is this: by working together – harder and smarter – we got rid of the red ink.

Indianapolis no longer faces a projected 170-million dollar deficit.

We aren't where we want to be yet, but unlike many others, this city is in the black!

We still need to build adequate reserves and a rainy day fund, but we are holding our own and we must keep moving Indianapolis forward by passing a fourth straight honestly balanced budget this year!

Just like families at home, we will spend within our means. We are working smartly to reduce spending and increase efficiency while also addressing critical needs.

Let us not forget that we eliminated the deficit and balanced the budget while also replacing 80 percent of our fleet of snow trucks, while investing in 550 new police cars, and while finding over 30 million dollars to improve our parks. It was a shameful and embarrassing episode in our city's history that our pools were leaking about 35 million gallons of water per year, and we fixed that.

Last month I proclaimed 2011 the year of Indy Parks in honor of its 100th birthday. At one of those events, a 20-year parks veteran came up to me and thanked me for investing in our parks system. She told me she hadn't seen such dramatic improvements in years.

The same can be said about upgrading our sewer system. We were among the first of over 700 cities to successfully renegotiate its sewer agreement with the federal government to lower costs AND better protect the environment.

Our new agreement with the federal government will result in cleaner water AND let utility customers keep 740-million dollars in their pockets! Let me say that again – 740-million dollars you, collectively, will be able to keep in your pocket!

It is a win for utility customers. It is a win for the environment. And now, as a community, we all can be proud that municipalities around the country are asking us to show them how we did it.

We are moving Indianapolis forward and changing the model of government. When I entered office there was a backlog of 200 discrimination claims dating back to 2002 in the Office of Equal Opportunity. It then took about 700 days to process a complaint. We cut the response time to about 100 days and the backlog is now zero!

Overall, spending with minority-owned businesses has skyrocketed from 15 million dollars in 2007 to 90 million dollars last year. For women-owned businesses, it's jumped from 2 million dollars in 2007 to over 44 million dollars.

Additionally, our city proudly boasts the highest number of monuments honoring our servicemen and women, outside of Washington, but we didn't have a single person whose sole job was to help Veterans. In fact, we were the only county in the state not to have a Veteran's Service Officer, even though it was required by law.

We changed that. Indianapolis now has such an officer - and we were the first city in the nation to implement a Veteran-owned business program.

Now, helping minority, women and veteran owned businesses is not just the right thing to do. It also cultivates the entrepreneurial spirit of our city. Those willing to take a chance on the promise of an idea deserve every opportunity to grow, and to thrive and to create new jobs in their communities.

Chris Barney is one of those entrepreneurs whose business is now thriving because he can compete for and win city business. We purchased 83 new trucks from his company, Team Cruiser Conversion.

The result is... Chris's business is benefiting. The people he employs are benefiting. Taxpayers are benefiting because many of those new trucks are helping the Indy Snow Force clear our streets. And, Chris' success allows him to give back to the community by helping students at Arsenal Technical High School become diesel mechanics. That's how it should work!

In so many ways our primary mission is to better connect people with their city government. Many people join us each month for the Mayor's Night Out meetings, which are a huge success. You know how difficult it used to be to get an answer when calling the old Mayor's Action Center.

No longer. You can now call or go online to make a report, get results and even get a call back.

And soon, you will be able to download an App on your I-Phone. This app will even let you send pictures of potholes to us, while the I-phone pinpoints the location using GPS. Now, how cool is that?

Governing in the next decade will force us to place efficiency over blind loyalty to ways of the past.

It is time we stand together and fight for the township government reform started by Mayor Richard Lugar and continued by Mayor Bart Peterson.

It is time for local government to have the flexibility to shift our tax dollars to critical needs – like our libraries.

It is time we unlock the millions in unspent tax dollars collected by our townships. You have already paid the tax, let's get the money out of the bank and put it to good use by paying down debt, reducing taxes, and investing in our community!

And, I thank the Indiana Senate for moving forward on our township government reform bill for Marion County.

As you know, making lasting reforms take time. The same is true when it comes to reforming public safety. We are working together to improve IMPD training, policies and procedures – and we are on-target for national certification of IMPD by 2013.

We are working to ensure the faces of our city's first responders reflect those in the community they serve. Last month I received an 80-page report from a task force I created in 2009 to improve diversity in the Department of Public Safety.

I want to thank Joe Slash, President and CEO of the Indianapolis Urban League; Reverend Richard Willoughby, Pastor of the Promise Land Christian Community Church; and Bruce Henry, the City's Human Resources Director for leading this initiative, and proposing significant improvements to our recruitment, our hiring, our

training and our promotion practices. I am personally meeting with them and will be helping to implement those reforms.

And some good news: You are safer on the streets of Indianapolis. Homicides are at the lowest level since 1995. Violent crime is down. Total crime is down year-over-year.

It should not take the death of David Moore to remind us of the bravery and dedication shown each and every day by the men and women who serve our community – in and out of uniform.

Officers who risk their lives to save people from drowning or jumping from a bridge.

Men and women who pushed themselves to the point of exhaustion moving the snow and melting the ice during two of the worst winters in a very long time.

Our police officers, our firefighters, and our Snow Force are out there every day doing their job - and we honor them for their work.

Now, recently we have seen some violence downtown. I am going to be very plainspoken here; I simply will not let a few wannabe thugs infect the heart of our city.

IMPD is beefing up its patrols, and I want to thank the parents, ministers and community leaders, like Donna Forbes, who have been acting as “hall monitors” at the mall and surrounding areas for years... but increasing police and community presence will only go so far.

It's time for some straight talk to the very small group of parents who see fit to drop their kids off at places like the mall each weekend and sometimes wait until late at night to pick them up. If you don't do your job as a parent, then you should be held accountable if your child causes trouble.

So, tonight I am directing City Prosecutor Helen Marchal to file Civil Complaints against the parents of minors who run afoul of the law. Parents can be held liable and fined for the actions of their children.

This community needs you to be a full-time parent. IMPD and the mall are not your babysitters!

Working together as a community is vital as we look toward the future of our great city. In less than one year, Indianapolis will shine on the world stage as we host the biggest annual sporting event on the planet.

Visitors and viewers from London, England to New London, Connecticut, and from Versailles, France to Versailles, Indiana will experience the vitality and hospitality of our city.

Forty years ago, we charted a course to build the facilities and amenities that would attract people and major events like the Super Bowl to Indianapolis. It is clearly working, but now we must build upon it. The Super Bowl is not the culmination of our growth, but it is evidence of it.

The next leg of our voyage also requires us to attract and keep people in our city. We must commit as a city to build our neighborhoods like we built our downtown and do the things which make our neighborhoods inviting for new residents, new ideas and new hope. That requires neighborhoods with better infrastructure, better education and better amenities. Basically, we must build an attractive urban environment.

We are already making great strides in addressing the issue of crumbling streets and sidewalks. As local governments slash infrastructure spending across the nation, Indianapolis is bucking that trend.

From Township Line Road to County Line Road - Pendleton Pike to Pike Plaza, neighborhood by neighborhood and block by block – RebuildIndy is transforming the city around us.

Families near Frog Hollow no longer have to pray that every rain spares their homes from flooding. Folks in Franklin Township rave about driving on “all new” roads. Alleys and sidewalks are connecting people in the heart of our city. And, in just a few months we will finish the beautification of Martin Luther King Boulevard, combining the rich history of that area and the legacy of Dr. King into one of the finest monuments of its kind in the nation.

You cannot escape the signs of progress. You see it as you navigate all of that construction. And we have barely scratched the surface of what is possible.

Once the water transfer to Citizens is complete, we will have hundreds of millions of dollars more to invest into our streets and sidewalks, and to demolish abandoned properties.

At the same time utility customers will have rates 25 percent lower than they otherwise would have been.

Two weeks ago we unveiled another 32 million dollars in improvements for the year ahead, and that's just for starters. These projects touch all nine townships and areas people thought the city had forgotten. It will fix problems from our inner city neighborhoods, all the way to outer edges of the county. I apologize in advance for the traffic backups ahead, but a little hassle for a short while is more than worth the long-term benefits to our community.

And, as we address our streets and sidewalks, we must deal with abandoned homes. They attract crime, they reduce property values and they pose a significant health risk to our families and children. Last year, we demolished a record 675 abandoned homes. That is four times more than usual, and we will do even more in 2011.

But, tearing down is simply not enough, we must use these opportunities to build an attractive urban environment and one of the most important rebuilding projects must be our schools. Indianapolis needs schools that parents want to move to - not from.

Indianapolis public, private and public-charter schools are making progress. It is simply false to say all public schools are failing. We have some outstanding public schools in our community. But we also have too many schools that are failing our children.

I want to thank Roland Dorson from the Greater Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce for spearheading the Common Goal initiative that provides graduation coaches and mentors in our public schools.

As the debate rages about the best way forward on education reform, I have three guiding principles to measure success:

One, reward innovation, including charter and magnet schools.

Two, reward good teachers and administrators.

Three, give children and parents a choice.

One example of these principles in action? Our charter schools.

We set high standards and hold our charter schools accountable. It's hard to argue with the fact that 90-percent of graduates from Mayor-sponsored charter schools enrolled in college.

Better schools. Good jobs. Repairs to our long-neglected streets and sidewalks. These accomplishments each support the foundation from which great neighborhoods rise.

We are making major strides toward Indianapolis becoming the most livable big city in America - but we still have a lot of work to do. And so together we will do that work.

A thriving urban environment requires more than homes, streets and schools. It must sustain the lifestyle of our urban residents. That includes Regional mass transit. Indianapolis simply cannot continue its remarkable growth as a city without a modern, regional mass transit system. That's why I assembled Indy Connect, a group of business leaders to develop a well thought out plan with public and private input.

This year, Indy Connect will study the costs and benefits of its proposal. I will not ask taxpayers to invest a single dollar in a mass transit system that does not make economic sense or benefit the entire region for decades to come.

I am also proud to have created the City's first "Office of Sustainability." I am equally proud the Indiana Association of Cities and Towns named Indianapolis the "2010 Green Community of the Year."

But, there is still so much more we need to do.

We are building rain gardens, urban gardens and bike lanes. We have doubled the number of homes and the amount of material picked up through curbside recycling, but still too few people know it is even available in Indianapolis.

Last month, we started a pilot program to provide curbside recycling containers and 90-days free service to about ten-thousand homes on the northeast side of town. I hope people take advantage of this free trial – and more people sign up as we expand these free trials in the next year.

With the Super Bowl less than a year away, our next moment in the world spotlight is nearly upon us, but let's keep in mind that it is only a moment. The greatness we seek as a community is larger than the capacity for any one-time event to shape an entire era.

The City of Indianapolis benefits more when we put the needs of the next decade ahead of the next day, the next year or the next election. We are more likely to succeed when we reach out, when we listen and when we make the decision to move forward together.

In areas big and small - we are moving Indianapolis forward. Thousands of our friends and neighbors hold the promise of a new job because of our aggressive pursuit of economic growth – and we are not done.

We are moving Indianapolis forward by making the tough choices that eliminated a projected 170-million dollar budget deficit – and we will pass another honestly balanced budget this year!

We are moving Indianapolis forward with new streets and sidewalks in areas previously thought forgotten.

AND, we are moving Indianapolis forward by not shirking our responsibility to lead. If something needs to be done, we will do it. And we will find a responsible way to pay for it.

On all sides of this Artsgarden, you can see the panorama of a city boldly moving forward. Who knows ... maybe 100 years from now, the Mayor of Indianapolis will marvel at the progress we have made together as they look back on this milepost of forward momentum.

It is a possibility...

- If we continue to choose progress over politics as usual.
- If we continue to reward innovation and oppose inaction.
- If we continue to come together in support of our common goal of moving Indianapolis forward - forward for all of city, forward for the long-haul, and forward to a very strong and prosperous future for generations to come!

Thank you for caring as much as you do about this great city of ours, and let's move forward together.

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